

A Founder Recalls

Bernard Pechter, one of the three founders of Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, shared with me the story of how the congregation came into being, 13 years ago....

For years Bernard had felt alienated from the Judaism he grew up with. Growing up as an orthodox Jew, Bernard believed that as a gay man there was no place for him in the Jewish community. This belief was unfortunately confirmed when he decided to approach a San Francisco rabbi in order to discuss his confusion and seek some comfort and advice. The rabbi encouraged Bernard to come to the young adult group of the synagogue. When Bernard protested and told the rabbi that he didn't believe the rabbi understood that Bernard was a homosexual, the rabbi *again* advised Bernard to come to the young singles group. At that time Bernard vowed never to return to that or any other syna-

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A Founder Reflects

If anything could have been predicted 13 years ago, it was that there would be a need for Sha'ar Zahav for a long time to come. When I was asked—as I was continually—why we needed our own synagogue, the answers I gave then are equally true now: to have our own "safe place," a shul where we could fully express and "be" ourselves, a congregation that would be dedicated to full and meaningful equality between women and men.

What I couldn't have expected were two developments of the 1980s, one horrible—AIDS, and the other wonderful—the increasing number of children in Sha'ar Zahav. Perhaps paradoxically, both of these phenomena have had similar effects on CSZ. They have both put a great strain on our personal and financial resources while at the same time, they've fostered our sense, and the actuality, of our community. For it is in both

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13TH ANNIVERSARY
BAR/BAT MITZVAH

*Thirteen years ago,
a small group assembled
for a shabbat service.
They prayed, they shmoozed,
they dreamed.*

*Congregation Sha'ar Zahav,
born out of that dream,
created a place for
gay and lesbian Jews
to come together.*

*As we celebrate our
thirteenth anniversary
in this special edition of
the Jewish Gaily Forward,
we look back at thirteen
years of growth, strength
and pride.*

13th Anniversary Edition

CSZ Lay Leadership

Congregation Sha'ar Zahav was founded 13 years ago by three men who had a desire for spiritual growth and the companionship of other Jewish gay men and lesbians. From the very first meeting of what was to become Sha'ar Zahav, the planning and execution of Friday night services and other programs was done by volunteers. As the synagogue grew and matured through the early years, various committees were formed and the strength and commitment of these volunteers and lay leaders continued. The committee structure that was established then became the framework for our structure today. This commitment was based on two factors: there simply was not the money to pay others to perform these tasks; but, more importantly, the vast majority of our early members did not want to be in a synagogue run and controlled by others. Many had negatively experienced those types of synagogues in their youths. Sha'ar Zahav became a place where each member had an important part to play—whether it was leading services on Friday night, helping to set up an Oneg Shabbat, planning a social program or volunteering to raise funds to buy a typewriter for our fledgling office.

This unusual concept in synagogue "administration" helped Sha'ar Zahav to become an unusual synagogue. Not only were we a synagogue with a special outreach to a specific element of the San Francisco Jewish community, we also were a synagogue run by its members—with each member having the opportunity to mold and re-form our programming, our liturgy, and every other aspect of synagogue life.

As our numbers grew, we drafted by-laws and formed a board of directors (Va'ad). Even when this structure was added, monthly board meetings remained open to all members. This is still true today, and it reflects the desire to keep the decisions about synagogue life an open one so that each member has the opportunity to contribute.

I am proud to say that for the more than 10 years that I have been a member of Sha'ar Zahav, we have had a commitment to gender equality on our Va'ad and within our congregation. Our board (consisting of four officers and nine members-at-large) and our service lead-

ers have been a gender-balanced group of wonderful women and men working together to lead the synagogue (somewhat rare in the lesbian and gay and Jewish communities). We have truly achieved gender parity and equality here at Sha'ar Zahav and that is something in which I take a great deal of pride.

This will be my last column in my capacity as president, and so I would like to take this opportunity to thank those people who have contributed so much to making this year a special one for me. I would like to thank all of our past presidents for being there for me, with special thanks to Daniel Chesir, Paul Cohen, Mike Rankin, Don Albert, Irene Ogus, Richard Inlander and Robin Leonard for their continued positions of leadership in the congregation. We have been especially blessed with strong, committed past presidents, whose vision and tenacity through some rough times have provided us with the firm foundation that we stand on today. I would also like to thank the current Va'ad and all our committee chairs for their hard work and dedication this past year. Special thanks to Allan Berenstein, Gail Friedlander, Robin Leonard, Merry Luskin and Ben Schalit for taking on special projects during the year, above and beyond the call of their elected offices. I also want to recognize Marc Mencher, our tireless social program chair for his extra efforts in helping me fulfill my responsibilities by agreeing to take on additional projects. Finally, I would like to thank Aaron Cooper, Ellen Elias, Jonathan Funk and Bruce Katz for giving me the loving support that I needed as a human being this year. Guiding an organization of over 500 individuals is not an easy task, and it was wonderful to be able to count on them for the emotional support that I needed.

As Merry Luskin steps into the office of president in July, I am confident that I am leaving her a synagogue steeped in the traditions of lay leadership and commitment. Of that I am quite proud, and I look forward to seeing us continue to grow and mature throughout the years. Thank you for the opportunity of serving you as president this year.

—Eric Keitel, President



Early temple organization chart from January 1978 Forward.

The Jewish Gaily Forward is published 11 times annually by Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, 220 Danvers at Caselli, San Francisco, California 94114, (415) 861-6932. Permission to reproduce material is freely given, and credit would be appreciated.

Members of the Congregation receive the *Forward*. For a donation of \$12/year, non-members will receive the *Forward*.

All newsletter copy should be typed, double-spaced and is due no later than the date of the Va'ad meeting. It should be sent to the synagogue office, marked to the attention of the *Forward*. All material is subject to editing; material will not be returned.

Members of the Newsletter Committee are Alita Rosenfeld & Howard Blechman, co-chairs, Leonard Brill, Joan Gelfand, Lane Schickler and Robin Leonard (general editorial and production), Michael Bettinger and Shirley Liberman (photographers), Rick Wilson (advertising coordinator), Allan Brandstein, Frank Hyman, Alex Ingersoll, Hal Podgur, Sam Thal and Eli Weinstein (distribution). The *Forward* is typeset by David Lester, Mouse Type Inc., and printed by Lou Greene.

Display Ads are \$15 per column inch for non-members and \$10 per column inch for members, with discounts available for size and frequency. Ads should be camera ready; any ads that require typesetting, camera and/or artwork will be subject to a one-time production charge.

Classified Ads are \$5 for up to 20 words, plus \$1 for each 10 additional words. No personals accepted.

Payment must accompany ad and should be sent to Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, 220 Danvers at Caselli, San Francisco, California 94114, marked attention *Forward* advertising. The advertising deadline is the second Monday of the month. The *Forward* reserves the right to reject any ad for reasons of taste.

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Rabbi's Column

Thirteen Years

The Hebrew terms *bar mitzvah* and *bat mitzvah* are often misunderstood. *Bar* and *bat* literally mean "son" and "daughter," respectively, and so, for generations, Jewish boys (and later, girls) grew up learning that at 13 they became "a son or daughter of the commandments." The idiomatic Hebrew meaning of *bar* and *bat*, though, is "a member of the group" or "part of the community." According to traditional Jewish law, 13 is the age of majority. When a child turns 13, he is responsible for fulfilling all of the *mitzvot*—i.e., she becomes a "member of the community of those who observe the *mitzvot*," a *bar/bat mitzvah*.

How then does a synagogue become *bar/bat mitzvah*? While we have no plan to hand out fountain pens, Sha'ar Zahav's 13th anniversary is similar to the transformation in the human life cycle symbolized by becoming *bar/bat mitzvah*. Like adolescents, we have experienced a "growth spurt" in our size. And along with our physical growth have come new challenges and new opportunities for spiritual and communal growth.

Congregation Sha'ar Zahav was founded to provide a safe place for gay and lesbian Jews to affirm and celebrate their identity and commitments. This primary identity and mission has not changed in the intervening 13 years. CSZ has been an important force for understanding, healing and integration in the lives of hundreds of individuals, their families, synagogues and the wider community.

Coming out as gay and lesbian people requires us to resist social pressure and to act against the expectations and roles of our society. Although we rarely think of it in such terms today, coming out is a revolutionary act. Joining a synagogue—let alone founding one—is generally considered to be the opposite kind of behavior, an act of identification with traditional values. Sha'ar Zahav has always had a dialectical role. This synagogue is a response to our oppression and invisibility in majority culture, a (literally) "counter-culture" place where

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13th Anniversary Honorees

During our Bar/Bat Mitzvah service on June 29, Sha'ar Zahav will honor four individuals from the greater San Francisco Jewish Community. This special recognition is a look back into the history of our congregation and the lesbian/gay community as a whole. These honors represent our attempt to thank individuals who have created the environment of support in which we have grown to this 13th year.

• **The Hon. Art Agnos** will receive our 13th Anniversary Community Recognition Award. Mayor Agnos has helped to create the foundation on which we have grown as an organization and as individuals. He is being honored primarily for the sponsorship of AB#1; his support of domestic partnership legislation; and his ongoing commitment to funding for AIDS treatment and support.

• **Rabbi Martin Weiner** of Congregation Sherith Israel has always provided Sha'ar Zahav with his heartfelt support. From the beginning he understood the need for a congregation of our own. He encouraged our growth and our membership in the UAHC.

• **Sharon Silverman**, past president of Congregation Sherith Israel, is a lay leader whose interest in our activities has helped us to achieve many of our recent dreams. Through her efforts our congregation has its own cemetery program and a flourishing gift shop.

• **Rabbi Robert Kirschner** of Congregation Emanu-El, has taken a leadership role in the fight against AIDS. As a friend of our congregation and our community, he has stimulated and guided the Jewish community's response to this crisis.

For these efforts, we at Congregation Sha'ar Zahav will take the opportunity of our 13th anniversary to say thank you.

Rabbi's Column

(Continued from page 3)

we affirm and celebrate our lives, loves and commitments. Simultaneously, Sha'ar Zahav links our personal identities and lives with the Jewish people today and its rich religious and cultural tradition and history.

These dual aspects of who and what we are have shaped our congregation from its earliest days. As we plan and build towards the future, we ask ourselves and one another the same questions our founders did as well as new questions they hardly considered. Our Judaism and our sexuality are both precious gifts which are integrated at Sha'ar Zahav; therefore, we ask: how do our Jewish values inform our lives as gay and lesbian people? How does what we have learned in the struggle for lesbian and gay liberation influence our response to Jewish tradition? Beloved as Judaism is, its written texts and received traditions reflect and reinforce patriarchy: how do we fully integrate the experiences and reality of women's lives into

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Mazel Tov! Sha'ar Zahav, on Your Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Rabbi Melanie Aron, Brooklyn, N.Y.
 Rabbi Raphael Asher, B'nai Tikvah,
 Walnut Creek
 Peter Barnes
 Rabbi Seth Bernstein, Temple Sinai,
 Worcester, Mass.
 B'nai Ha-Aretz, Redway
 Rabbi Terry Bookman, Congregation
 Sinai, Fox Point, Wisc.
 Rabbi Eric & Deborah Bram, St. Louis
 Rabbi Steven Chester, Temple Sinai,
 Oakland
 Rabbi Judy Cohen-Rosenberg, Temple
 Brith Kodesh, Rochester, N.Y.
 Congregation Beth Am, Los Altos
 Hills
 Congregation Or Chadash, Chicago
 William Cutter, Hebrew Union
 College, Los Angeles
 Rabbi Beth Davidson, Nashville, Tenn.
 Rabbi Jerome K. Davidson, Temple
 Beth-El of Great Neck, N.Y.
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 Ellenson, Los Angeles
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 Rabbi Howard Leibson, Temple Israel,
 Long Beach
 Rabbi Robert Levine, and R. Jerome
 Malino, United Jewish Center,
 Danbury, Conn.
 Amy Markowitz
 Boris L. O'Mansky, M.D., Baltimore
 Hebrew Congregation, Pikesville,
 Md.
 Rabbi Sanford Ragins, Leo Baeck
 Temple, Los Angeles
 Rabbi John and Barbara Rosove, Temple
 Israel of Hollywood, Los Angeles

Scott Mezistrano
 Safeway Supermarkets
 Rabbi Richard Shapiro, Temple Israel,
 Stockton
 Rabbi Malcolm Sparer, Northern
 California Board of Rabbis, San
 Francisco
 Rabbi Julie Spitzer, Baltimore Hebrew
 Congregation, Baltimore, Md.
 Rabbi Jack Stern, Westchester Reform
 Temple, Scarsdale, N.Y.
 Rabbi Joshua S. Taub, Temple Rodef
 Sholom, Waco, Texas
 Rabbi H. David Teitelbaum, Temple
 Beth Jacob, Redwood City
 Temple Emanu-El, San Jose
 Temple Sinai, Reno, Nev.
 Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman, The
 Temple, Atlanta
 Rabbi J. Weizenbaum, Temple Emanu-
 El, Tucson, Ariz.
 Rabbi Margaret M. Wenig, Beth Am
 The People's Temple, New York
 Rabbi Paula Winnig, Temple Sholom,
 Floral Park, N.Y.
 Rabbi Marjorie Yudkin, Temple Cove-
 nant of Peace, Easton, Pa.

CSZ Ritual and Liturgy

"Men, as Well as Women, Are Encouraged to Wear a Tallit"

At every service ever held at Sha'ar Zahav, we have had our own prayerbooks with de-genderized liturgy. The technology, however, has been steadily improving. Our first Friday night prayerbooks were photocopied from *Gates of Prayer* with male references to God "whited out" and corrected in handwriting. These first prayerbooks were compiled by a kindergarten teacher and the text was enriched with adorable little drawings. One thing that was left out, though, was page numbers. Our earliest services were often punctuated with directions to "please turn to the page that looks like this (service leader holds up book) and rise." We used the method of borrowing liturgy from other sources and changing pronouns until 1982, when we began writing our first original liturgy: "*Machzor U'v'charta Bachayim—Therefore Choose Life.*"

If those of us who undertook the task of composing this liturgy knew what it entailed before we began, I wonder if we would have undertaken it. However, the process was as rewarding as it was exhausting. Through the writing and editing process, we came to terms with the meaning that the traditional liturgy held for each of us, our vision of the kind of

service in which we wanted to take part, and a good idea of each other's, and our own, beliefs. The Rosh Hashanah portion of the *machzor* was used for the first time in 1983, and the Yom Kippur book followed in 1984. Since that time, liturgy subcommittees have produced original liturgy in the form of the Shabbat morning prayerbook and the Passover Haggadah. Ironically, the only Sha'ar Zahav liturgy remaining that is not originally written is the one we use most often—the Friday night prayerbook—and its revision will be our next project.

Although we knew from the start that we wanted our prayers to refer to God as neither male nor female, and to reflect both men and women in referring to humanity, we learned through the years that there were other conventions of language that we wished to avoid. Our current guidelines, adopted in 1984, suggest that we avoid physical handicaps as metaphors for moral shortcomings ("We are deaf to their pleas" ... "Forgive those who blindly see only themselves reflected in You") and imagery with negative racial connotations ("Our blackest sins will be white as snow"). We have also, in recent years, avoided liturgical language which presumes that all congregants are gay or lesbian.

Similarly, Sha'ar Zahav has always

striven to have an equal balance of men and women on the *bimah*. This has been more difficult at some times than at others, but it has always had a high priority with the synagogue leadership, and with good reason. Many people have told us that coming to CSZ for the first time and hearing a woman sing *Kol Nidre* had an enormous effect upon them. I was once in a discussion with three active female members of our congregation, each of whom had first come to the temple on High Holidays and been impressed by a woman preaching a sermon, and each of whom later went on to preach a High Holiday sermon herself. Sha'ar Zahav offers all its congregants the opportunity to take on ritual leadership, and learn the skills necessary to attain such leadership. The egalitarianism carries over to those who never want to be on the *bimah*. I always enjoy standing at the back of the sanctuary, and seeing some women wearing *kipot*, and some men *not* wearing them. Or, in the words of one of our service leaders welcoming congregants to a Rosh Hashanah morning service: "There is a basket with *tallitot* at the back of the room. Men, as well as women, are encouraged to wear a *tallit*."

—Leslie Bergson, Ritual Committee

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Social Action

(Continued from page 13)

exploring issues in lesbian and gay Jewish parenting. And in time for the November election, we raised nearly \$1,000 and staffed phone banks to help educate people about the city's domestic partners bill, which tragically lost.

This year, Sharyn Saslafsky, Claudia Bernard and many others have participated in the Mayor's Interfaith Task Force on Homelessness—Interfaith Shelter Program by baking cookies, shopping for groceries and preparing meals. We donated \$1,000 from the AIDS Fund to help the Names Project raise money to take the quilt to Israel. And as we write this article, CSZ and the rest of the Jewish community are gearing up for Operation Exodus, the relocation of Soviet Jews here and in Israel. CSZ's response, no doubt, will be substantial.

—Robin Leonard, Vice President



Once again the Unitarian Center sanctuary was filled to capacity with worshipers at CSZ services for High Holidays 5747.

PHOTO BY AMY BLASENHEIM

“Adonai has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary. Be strong and do it.”

— I Chronicles 28:10

San Francisco Chronicle

May 19, 1983



Columnists Do It Weakly

... Sha'ar Zahav, the gay congregation that has been floating from place to place, is acquiring a synagogue of its own this fall — the Latter-day Saints church at Caselli and Danvers.

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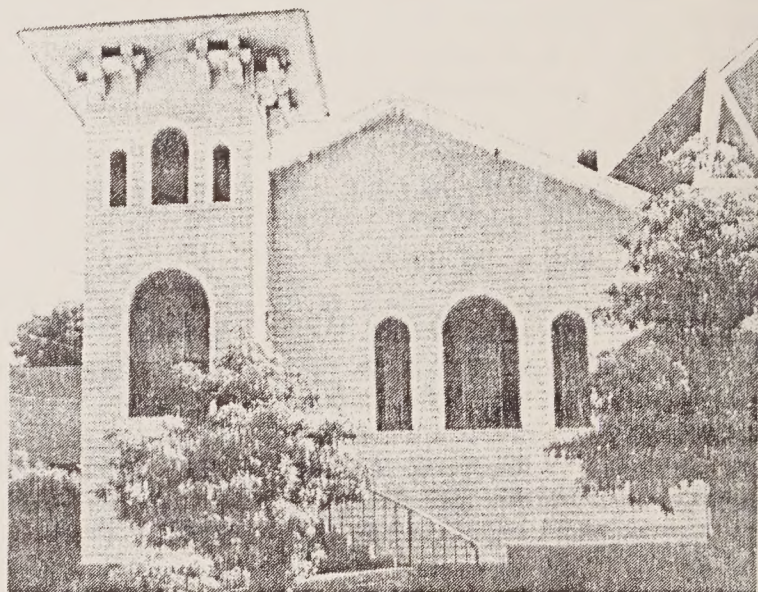


PHOTO BY YO SCHNEEFMAN

Near Unanimous Vote

Congregation Votes For A Home of Our Own!



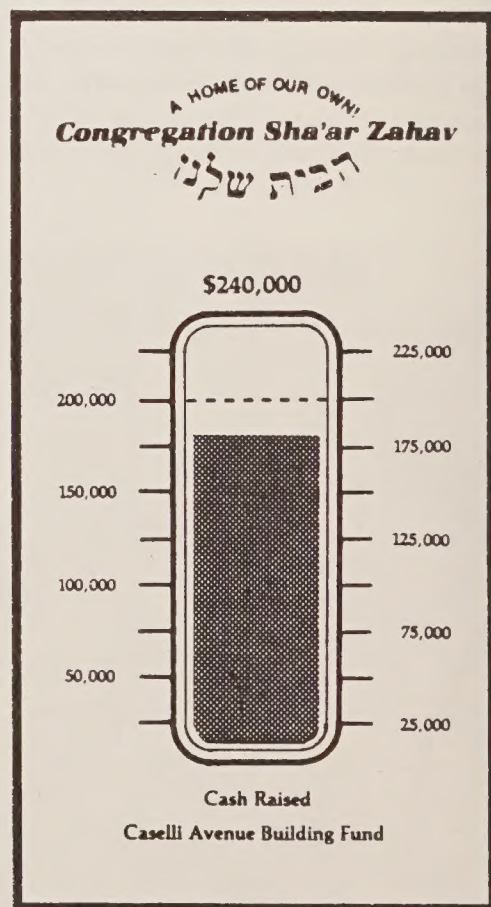
Voices erupted spontaneously in a spirited rendition of “Haveinu Shalom Aleichem” at the May 15 Congregational meeting with the announcement that a vote to purchase the building at 201 Caselli Avenue received near unanimous approval. With over 90% voting in favor, this decision represents perhaps the greatest show of solidarity in the history of Sha'ar Zahav.

Important Notice!

The location of our regular shabbat services has been changed to 201 Caselli Avenue (corner of Danvers), The Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints, our future home!



*Slightly Used Rolls — Only \$50!
(Discrete Vehicle Seeks
New Owner in Sha'ar Zahav Raffle)*



Our Goal

CSZ Family Life



Some of our less-seasoned members gather at a special Shabbat celebration of the Children's Chavurah. (April 1987)

PHOTO BY AMY BLASENHEIM

Founder Reflects

(Continued from page 1)

of these areas that CSZ continues to provide a perspective that is unique and through which we make a singular contribution to our larger community.

"In the beginning," CSZ had virtually no place at all in the Jewish community, not locally and certainly not nationally. It was impossible for us to buy a paid ad for High Holiday services in the *Jewish Bulletin*, let alone get the copious and favorable coverage we currently enjoy. We had no contact with any Jewish synagogue or agency. By contrast, CSZ is now actively involved in communal affairs in San Francisco and on a much wider stage.

Looking back over these 13 years, I'm continually amazed at the degree to which we have developed as a full-fledged community in our own right, as well as becoming an integral part of San Francisco and national Jewish life. At "the beginning," I had real doubts about the long-term viability of our organization. Now it's clear that we will go "from strength to strength" in continuing to serve our communities for many years to come.

—Daniel Chesir, Co-Founder

Our family's involvement in Jewish tradition was a decision made in acute awareness of our status as "non-traditional." The first generation of lesbians and gay men choosing to have children together is doing something new in history. As a progressive activist, I loved the revolutionary nature of this act. But I had enlisted my son, Max, as an involuntary pioneer. Who knew what he would have to contend with? I wanted him to be able to balance the novelty of his family structure with a connection to a tradition and community that stretched back in time for centuries. Sha'ar Zahav was perfect for us, the place where both worlds met.

My first visit to CSZ was the initial event of the Family/Children's Chavurah. I don't remember much, except for feeling totally ill at ease. I had probably been in a synagogue before this only two or three times in my life. Had I ever before talked to a rabbi? When Rabbi Kahn took the children into the sanctuary, unrolled the Torah and asked them to find the largest letter they could, I was both moved and charmed. This is what I wanted for Max. (Did I know then it was what I wanted for myself?)

For a while after that, my involvement in Sha'ar Zahav focused on the events of the chavurah—mostly potlucks and holiday celebrations. I'd like to say this was an opportunity to talk about what

we were all going through as gays/lesbians and as parents and that being Jewish was part of it all too. But I am trying to remember, did we ever finish a conversation in those days? The chavurah events were chaotic, with a high density of infants and toddlers. Still, there was affirmation just being in a room full of like spirits, and we did manage moments of contact between the interruptions and interventions.

The next phase of my participation at the temple was a year or so when Max and I came regularly to Friday services. Although I never attended a synagogue as a child, somehow the experience was as familiar as a memory or recurring dream. I loved the combination of silent prayer, inspiring sermons and lots of singing. I realized that I had found my spiritual life, of all places, in a synagogue.

And what kept Max willing to come? The delicious cookies at the oneg, the presence of men, the mysterious Hebrew, the rabbi's charisma, the warmth and affection?

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Since the founding of Kadimah, our education program for children, we rarely attend regular services (and Kadimah has also pretty much eclipsed the Family Chavurah activities). We do have our Shabbat ritual, the prayers over candles, bread and juice that I never learned as a child, that somehow round the week off for us together. Last year in Kadimah, the kids were asked to illustrate their favorite Jewish holiday. I expected Max to choose Chanukah with all of its presents, but he picked Shabbat.

I love that Max is attending Kadimah, getting the training that I missed. I hope at some point to be able to get it for myself. A few weeks ago, we went to CSZ's family weekend at Camp Swig. This was a chance to share Jewish education—both with our children and with our fellow congregants—and a chance to relax and make connections. It seems the beginning of yet another phase of family life within Sha'ar Zahav. I look forward to this and all future aspects of my family's growth and education at CSZ.

—Margaret Rossoff

Sha'ar Zahav in the World

"Do not separate yourself from the community."

—Pirke Abot

"Spend Sukkot 1982 in Israel!" the ad in the *Jewish Bulletin* read. "Federation Leadership Mission Leaving Immediately After Yom Kippur."

That sounded great to me. I'd long wanted to go to Israel. The price and the time were right. As for Federation, I knew only that they were sort of a "Jewish United Way," and that they didn't like our congregation very much. Perhaps in addition to touring Israel I could find out why (not that I didn't already have my suspicions).

The tour participants had an informal get-together at George Frankenstein's home a week before we left, and I quickly decided I liked these people. That was confirmed on the tour itself, notwithstanding the fact that while I was taking advantage of the facilities in a Kibbutz in the Galilee, the tour bus left me, and I had to hitchhike to Haifa.

When I got to the hotel in Haifa, I learned that the "pitch" for contributions had been made on the bus. So I got a personal solicitation in my hotel room, from Sheldon Wolfe and George. I listened patiently to their list of good things my contributions would support, then told them I couldn't donate at all at this time. Why? Because when members of my congregation offered to help with "Super Sunday" solicitations, we were told in effect, "don't call us, we'll call you." When we showed up to help anyway, we were kept at arms' length. Every congregation whose members participated was thanked in the next week's *Bulletin*—except Sha'ar Zahav.

George and Sheldon were appalled. They clearly hadn't known about it, and promised to find out what was going on. A week or so later I got a call from Shel. The staff at Federation told him we had been so treated because to welcome us might "offend the Orthodox." He'd put a stop to this blatant homophobia and henceforth we'd be welcomed like everyone else. We were. Now members of our congregation participate fully in all Federation activities, and serve on its committees. When Ron Kaufman was president of Federation a few years ago, he and Barbara worshipped with us one Shabbat, and after the oneg spoke to us

about the importance of including the gay and lesbian Jewish community in all Jewish activities in the Bay Area. We had come full circle!

That's only one example of how we gay men and lesbians have honored the admonition to remain a part of the community—a vital and vocal part. We can also be proud of our work on behalf of Ethiopian and Soviet Jews, and in support of Israel, even when we disagree with some of its government's policies.

We joined the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1983, but

friends, their families, co-workers, and lovers. The UAHC has passed four resolutions calling for an end to discrimination against gay people everywhere—including in the rabbinate and the colleges.

In 1985, a member of the congregation spoke as an openly gay Jew at the National Hillel Directors Conference at Grossingers, urging Hillel leaders to welcome gay and lesbian college students. He later became chair of the Hillel Board in San Francisco, where other members of the congregation now serve as administrative staff.

CONGREGATION SHA'AR ZAHAV



THE
JEWISH
DAILY

FORWARD

OCTOBER 1982

שנר זזה

TISHREI / HESHVAN 5743

Congregation to Receive UAHC Charter

didn't really get involved in the leadership until the UAHC Torah Commentary was published in 1984. It was so bad on Leviticus XVIII and on homosexuality that a member of the congregation showed up in the offices of the senior staff in New York to protest—successfully. The section was re-written for the next edition by members of Sha'ar Zahav. We now have two members on the Regional UAHC Board, one on the National Board of Trustees, and representation on all major committees, including the co-chair of the Committee on AIDS, which committee came into being incidentally as part of a resolution brought by our congregation to the 1985 Biennial in Los Angeles.

At that Biennial, Sha'ar Zahavniks organized the first-ever workshop on gay and lesbian Jews. It has now become an expected part of all national Biennials, and has made a wonderful difference in the lives of our gay and lesbian

Jewish publications? Hardly a major Jewish publication has not had an article written by a member of Sha'ar Zahav. This includes *Moment*, *Tikkun*, *Reform Judaism*, and the *Journal of Reform Judaism* (publication of the Central Conference of American Rabbis), among others. The *Jewish Bulletin* once would not print the announcements of our services. Now we are invited to write editorial think pieces, and a non-gay member of the *Bulletin* staff is a member of our congregation.

The impact of Sha'ar Zahav on the wider Jewish world is remarkable. What we've done has been in the cause of justice, not for ourselves alone, but for all gay people, for all Jews, and for all those who want to build a better world.

But we haven't completed the task. Gay and lesbian Jews are still discriminated against in some of our seminaries and congregations. It's still not possible

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Rabbi's Column

(Continued from page 4)

a tradition which has long repressed them? Thirteen years ago, coming out for most of us meant letting go of the idea that we would be parents. Today, we have more than 50 children in our synagogue, and more are planned or on the way. What lessons and messages do we wish to teach them? How do we integrate our children into the lives of our community? On the other hand, our first generation of members is growing older. How will we meet their changing needs in the coming years? Ten years ago, just about everyone knew everyone. Now we have more than 500 members. How do we maintain the *haimish* quality of our congregation as we continue to grow? Our spirituality, our liturgy, our programs and our supportive community are increasingly bringing non-gay Jews to CSZ. Having ourselves been excluded for so long, we seek to be wel-

coming to all. How do we fully welcome the increasing numbers of non-gay Jews who have found their spiritual and religious home at this synagogue without losing sight of our mission? Finally, another question that was unimaginable 13 years ago: how do we keep going in the face of an epidemic which continues to take its toll on so many of us and those we love?

These questions, along with others yet unasked, require our attention at this time of *bar/bat mitzvah*. The Long-Range Planning Committee, the Va'ad, the synagogue's various committees and our informal shmoozing amongst one another are the fora where these important questions about our future are being discussed. We are a pluralistic congregation which values and celebrates diversity. As we wrestle with these difficult questions, let us remember that what unites us is greater than what divides us. For like any sincere *bar/bat mitzvah*, this milestone in our congregational life does not mean the end of our commitment to Jewish study, life and community. It marks the beginning of a new stage in our communal life and a renewed commitment to furthering our common values and shared tasks. I look forward to sharing and building our future together. May we go together from strength to strength.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for the support, commitment and love you have given me over these last five years. The prayerbook's words resonate ever more strongly for me: "*Ashreinu!* How fortunate are we! How goodly is our portion, how beautiful our inheritance."

With deep affection,
—Rabbi Yoel H. Kahn

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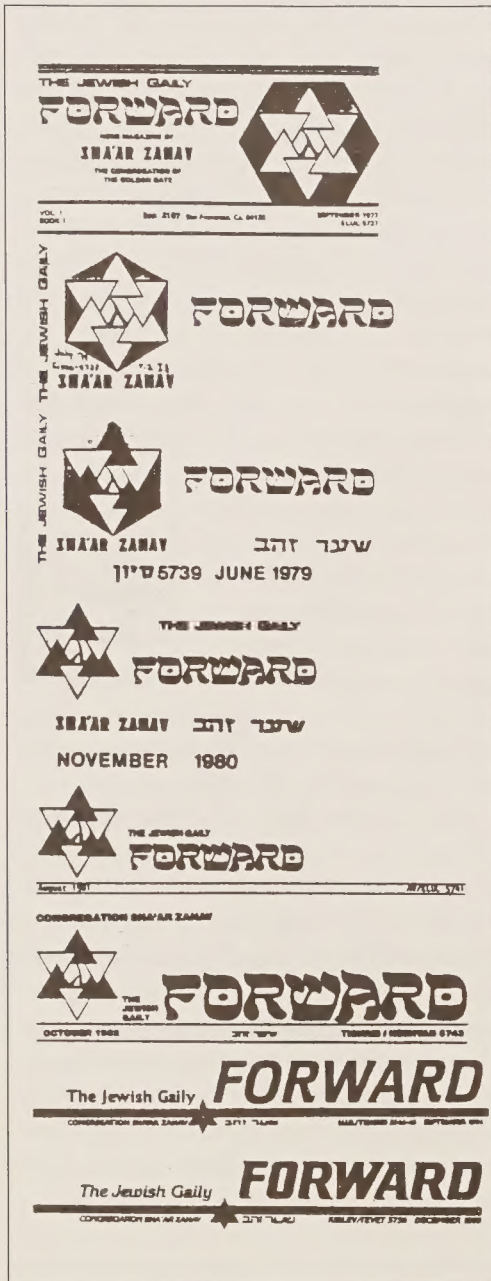
• Member, UAHC •

Old ad (don't panic, Yoel!) from March 1984 Forward.

Forward

(Continued from back page)
of Rabbi's Relationship with the Congregation" (September 1988).

The first congregational statement of purpose, titled "Who Are We?", appeared in October 1977, and it's a remarkable document in its continuing validity. It also included a footnote, introducing a five-year quest: "We are looking for a home for Sha'ar Zahav—any ideas? Let us know!"



Subsequent issues announced new temporary homes, from Glide Memorial to the Buddhist Monastery in January 1978. By April 1978, the calendar started to carry a banner reminding readers of the current home-of-the-month at: 121 Leavenworth, Dovre Hall in July 1978, and the June 1979 issue directed us to the the JCC.

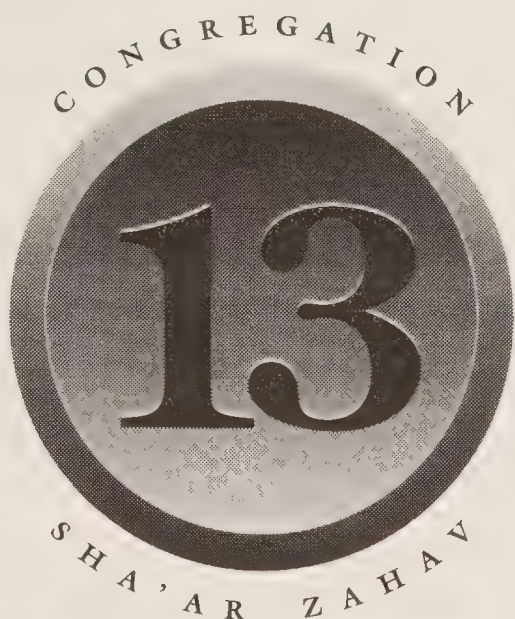
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Forward front-page banners from (top to bottom) 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1984 and 1989





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Forward

(Continued from previous page)

The campaign for a real home was announced in our July 1981 issue by Mark Feldman as the initial *A Home of Our Own* campaign was started. When the campaign for 220 Danvers started in June 1983, a photo of the building appeared on the cover, and the *Forward* became an integral part of the campaign, with regular articles from Don Albert and Irene Ogus and a monthly thermometer graphically gauging growing contributions.

Another ongoing quest was our search for a rabbi. From 1983 to 1985, the *Forward* chronicled the process—starting with the announcement of the committee in September 1983, the publication of the ad and job description being used in March 1984, a description of CSZ in April 1984 and coverage of the congregational vote in June 1985. The process was complete with coverage of Rabbi Kahn's installation in September 1985.

What's happening? The first issue (September 1977) listed three upcoming events—a Sabbath dinner, High Holiday services and a Chinese Banquet at the Golden Pavilion in Chinatown. The calendar of events first took up a full page in May 1978. By May 1980, a monthly grid calendar was published, but by January 1989 events had outgrown even the best typesetter's abilities to fit them into a grid.

As time passed, our events were more varied. Just a few have been: our booth at the Haight Ashbury Fair (May 1978); a weekend jogging group (July 1978); a Bette Midler concert in Concord (September 1979); the Bicycle Chavurah (July 1980); Golden Gate Park Historical Walk and Picnic (October 1980); CSZ Night at Skate World in El Sobrante (October 1980); A Night with the A's (July 1981); two (!) Tupperware parties (February 1981 and January 1986); numerous garage sales (1980–82) and the formation of a weekly Rap Group (January 1982).

Although many of these are features which might be shared by other newsletters, they are made special by their content, by who we were, what we did and how we said it. That we might say it differently is evident in the report on our second annual softball game, sponsored

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Forward

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by the Women's Chavurah, written in verse: "Nine Inning Stanzas," by Duff Kreitzberg (December 1982).

How is the *Forward* unique? Sharyn Saslafsky, long-time chair of the Public Relations Committee, often has said that the *Forward* was her best assistant. Not only do we reach the membership, but we reach the larger community: a typical monthly mailing goes to more than 400 members and 700 in the community, all around the world. That we have been so effective in that area may have to do with some of the things that set us apart from other "temple bulletins."

Many UAHC leaders have noted that they read the *Forward* because we really do publish what's going on at Sha'ar Zahav. That candor is especially apparent in early issues when the congregation was still finding itself—perhaps most clearly in the open letter of resignation from three women Va'ad members, published in February 1979, and the resulting discussion on that issue and the larger question of whether we should have a rabbi.

Other issues that have been addressed frankly in our pages include the subtle discrimination focused on Jews by Choice (articles in December 1978 and April 1985) as well as a remarkable article by Rachel Wahba in January 1981 on the conflicts of growing up as an Iraqi "Arab Jew" and then living with other displaced Jews in Japan.

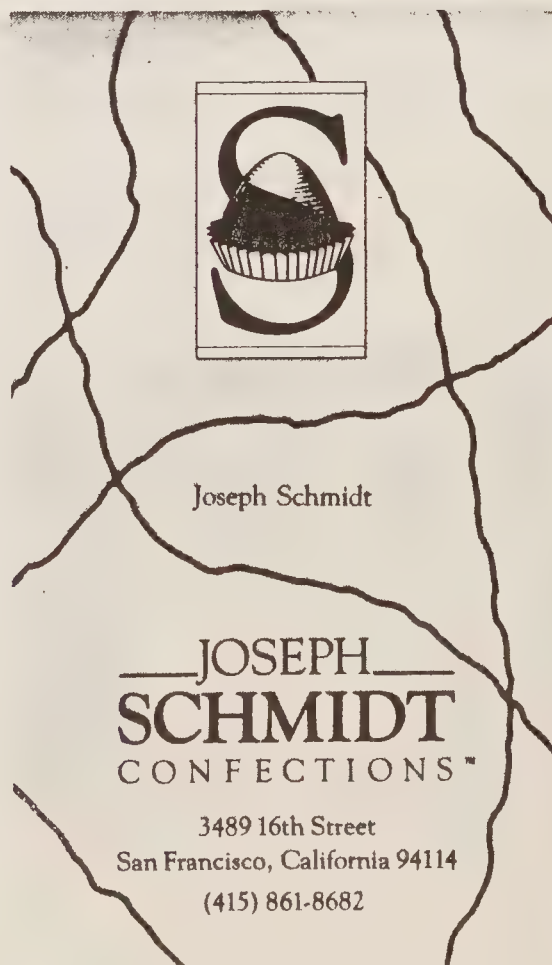
Were you paying attention? The pages of the *Forward* have served to educate our members and the community in many areas. Ritually, we have benefited not only from columns from our rabbi, but from many articles from the Ritual Committee, with the most notable examples being Laurie Radovsky's articles starting in June 1980 and Leslie Bergson's two-year writing spree starting in December 1983. Some taught us new ways to look at familiar holidays, some explained more obscure Jewish events and some gave us insights into spirituality.

Even from the treasurer's pen we've learned. Perhaps the most studied were two articles by David Stein: "Tzedakah Comes of Age" on growing into the responsibility of giving (February 1984) and "Therefore Choose Life," a passionate High Holiday appeal (September

Continued on next page



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Forward

(Continued from previous page)

1985).

Although he would never 'fess up, Mike Rankin has been a principle educator. He has contributed countless articles over the years on the UAHC; on his response to a letter in the *Jewish Bulletin* describing gays as "unnatural" (March 1984); on the start of his expansive and rewarding dialogue with a local rabbi following critical remarks on homosexuality (October 1984); and on a JCF sponsored trip from Prague to Jerusalem, in which we could share the profoundness of his discovery of the current state of Judaism in those travels.

We are family. Sha'ar Zahav has traditionally been a family to its members and has recognized those members in all senses of the word. We have celebrated each other's joys and sorrows. Birthdays were first published in July 1979; yahrzeits in June 1979; and the first "Simcha" column (later "Naches") in August 1985. We started publishing "Anniversaries" in August 1986 and new members to the family in February 1984. Our first Bar Mitzvah was announced in November 1980, and our first Bat Mitzvah in January 1981.

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As early as the January 1978 issue, a death was announced in our family. In the July 1983 issue we began the practice of publishing obituaries. Since then, obituaries have appeared with unfortunate frequency.

Family is a theme in many articles, and in the February 1980 issue, Leila Raim renamed her monthly Membership Column, "The Family Circle."

Any volunteers? The *Forward* has always been the bearer of countless thank you's to our many volunteers. In August 1985, we published the first of a series of "Behind the Scenes" articles to recognize the hidden volunteers; and to further encourage volunteerism, in November 1985 we published our first "Spotlight on ..." a volunteer, with 15 to 20 volunteers profiled during the ensuing years.

Our celebrity contributor: The *Forward* has had at least one genuine celebrity; the first "So Ask Aunt Yente," published in March 1984, started with an innocent question from a reader:

Continued on next page

Forward

(Continued from previous page)

Dear Aunt Yente,

Can you possibly believe that the events of the so-called Purim holiday ever happened?

Pugnacious in Piedmont

Each question was followed by an insightful, humorous, often irreverent, but ultimately respectful examination, in the best Brooklyn style west of the Sierra. Until Aunt Yente published her "Last of the Yentas" notice in October 1988, she tackled such topics as "Should I feel guilty if my lover and I have sex after Friday night services?" and "What's wrong with my electric menorah; I'm afraid real candles will melt my Levelors!" Along the way, she worked in explanations of the *neir tamid*, a knish recipe, how to make shmaltz and latkes, why do we say *kaddish*, and much more.

Aunt Yente never ducked volatile subjects like "Does having a rabbi mean that we're finally legitimate?" and "Is it a sin if I go with my lover to a Christmas Eve service?" For our enrichment, and to help us get through some of the columns, she even published a clip-and-save "Yente's Partial Dictionary of Yiddish Dialect and Language" (January 1986).

During that period, each month most readers turned to Yente's page first. She was even required reading for Sunday Schools in Cleveland! Everywhere we were asked "So who's Aunt Yente? Doesn't anyone know who she is?" And we never found out. Even Garry Koenigsberg, her faithful typist, never told.

Our history (and our future): In addition to all of the above, the *Forward* serves quite simply as the most accessible archive of our history. In the May 1980 issue, Co-Leader Penny Dachinger published the first history of CSZ—to bring new members up on our "roots," as we faced the prospect of voting on a radical change in our leadership structure—a knowledge we can all benefit from. On our 10th anniversary, another compilation occurred, especially Mike Rankin's summation in "But If We Are For Ourselves Alone, What Are We? Sha'ar Zahav in the World" (July 1987). And now we add another chapter.

Back issues are available in the library for you to read about us firsthand. And, of course, the Newsletter Committee always has a place for those who would like to help create the future ... history.

—Alex Ingersoll, Former Editor

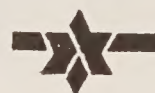
"If I am not for myself who will be for me?
If I am only for myself, what am I?
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*Tilul, Chapter 4
Talmud, Tractate Avot*

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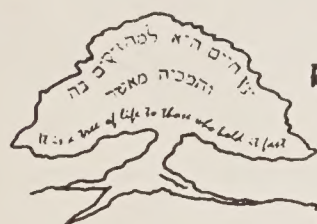
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The Forward Comes of Age

Five years ago, in an article in the *Forward*, Irene Ogus wrote: "Whenever a synagogue newsletter receives accolades during the same month, as did the *Forward* in July, from both the local director of the UAHC and the minister of a Unitarian Church in Houston, you know that there is something unusual about the publication...." She also added that a local rabbi had called the *Forward* "more interesting to read than any other synagogue newsletter that crosses his desk." We must be doing something right.

The September 1977 issue, our debut, introduced *The Jewish Gaily Forward NewsMagazine of Sha'ar Zahav, The Congregation of the Golden Gate*. "NewsMagazine?" Says something about dreams and *chutzpa*, doesn't it? In these 13 years, clearly the *Forward* has changed (by 1988, it had been scaled down to a "newsletter" for one thing), but there's also a consistency to that evolution which mirrors the growth of our congregation.

The first Editorial Policy was published in the April 1981 issue: "The *Jewish Gaily Forward* is the official publication of [CSZ]. It is also a major public relations and publicity vehicle. It therefore must strive to present a positive image of the congregation in an intelligent and informative manner reflecting our activities, concerns, and highest aspirations."

The bottom line is that the *Forward* has always let members know what was happening at, in, to and around Sha'ar Zahav. It has announced services, meetings and events to come, and reported on what has transpired—with photos when available. That it is the primary means of communication with members is reflected in the "official" columns and articles.

The "official" columns. The columns started with "from a/the co-leader" appearing in the April 1979 issue (in the then-current rage of no initial caps). In

THE JEWISH GAILY FORWARD

NEWS MAGAZINE OF
SHA'AR ZAHAV

THE CONGREGATION OF
THE GOLDEN GATE



VOL. 1
BOOK 1

Box 2107 San Francisco, Ca. 94126

SEPTEMBER 1977
ELUL 5737

Shalom

MAY YOU HAVE A GOOD AND SWEET YEAR! "5738"

WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO CELEBRATING OUR FIRST HIGH HOLIDAY SERVICES

that column, Daniel Chesir addressed the first Va'ad resignations of women over perceived sexism and male domination of CSZ and discussed if we were becoming a mainstream, establishment synagogue. In typical CSZ style, his subsequent columns were titled "off the (eastern) wall."

In the July 1981 issue came the "President's Column," reflecting a change in leadership structure, initiated by Paul Cohen. Probably not by chance, the "Va'ad Briefing," which first appeared in February 1981, became the ever-popular "Va'ad Report" in September 1981 during this period.

Our first rabbi, Allen Bennett, initiated a column called "from where i

stand" which carried monthly messages and news updates and chronicled the first steps toward our inclusion in UAHC.

Since August 1985, Rabbi Kahn has set forth his thoughts in "From the Rabbi" on topics ranging from the Torah to the LaRouche Campaign, from AIDS to summer reading and from Chief Justice Rose Bird to Operation Exodus.

Not just columns, but policy announcements, too. The first report on organizational structure appeared in January 1978 and numerous policies have followed, including our "Kashrut Policy" (November 1984), our "Gifts Policy" (February 1985), and the "Policy

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